

CONCLUSION

AS WIN drove along the River Road, Ross Wilton said, "Look here, Miss Layton, suppose that I should — well — suppose that I actually reached some agreement with Lockhart to-night?"

She kept her eyes on the road, her deft touch on the wheel guiding the car smoothly around the winding curves.

"Let me tell you something, Ross Wilton," she said. "No murder case was ever squared by any understanding with any one."

Wilton said, "I don't think Judge Koomes understands the situation — that is, I don't think he appreciates its sinister possibilities."

"Meaning what?" Win asked.

"They might convict Judge Koomes of murder. He has motive, opportunity and . . . Well, there's some damaging circumstantial evidence against him — that hat, for instance."

"Do you think Judge Koomes killed him?" Win asked abruptly.

"No," Wilton said, but his tone lacked conviction.

"Neither do I," Win said.

"Then who did?"

"That's something we're going to find out."

"Just how are we going to go about finding out?"

Win said, "I'm playing a hunch."

There was an interval of silence. Wilton said, "You're a mighty clever young woman, Miss Layton. Do you know that?"

"I've been told I was," she admitted, "from time to time," and then, after just the right interval added, with a smile, "by people who wanted something."

"No," he told her. "I'm serious."

"Thank you."

"Just how much of all this are you going to publish?"

"I don't know."

The lawyer changed the subject abruptly. "Look here," he said, "I hope that the termination of this case won't terminate our acquaintanceship. Won't it be possible for me to meet you again in the near future where we can dance without having a sword hanging over our heads?"

She laughed. "A sword is *always* hanging over a reporter's head, only sometimes they call it an axe."

"Well," he persisted, "even so, can't we meet and dance?"

She said, "I rather fancied there was a slight coolness on the part of Patricia Koomes when I last saw her."

"Am I to be held responsible for that?"

She looked at him squarely. "Yes."

"I see," he told her grimly.

He turned and looked at the police dog sprawled out on the back seat, muzzle on its paws, alert ears showing its interest.

"Nice dog," he said.

"Yes, isn't she?"

"Had her long?"

"Not very."

"Protection, I suppose."

"You might call it that — have you ever seen her before?"

"Why, no." He stared thoughtfully at the dog, then said, "Pardon me, was there some particular reason you had for asking that last question?"

"Just making conversation," she told him.

"Sometimes," he said, "I feel that you're — well, a little too much for me."

She laughed. "You must have an inferiority complex." After that he was silent.

Win Layton turned the car sharply to the right. "You're sure this is the road?" Wilton asked.

"Yes. I've seen the place," she said. "A friend pointed it out to me one afternoon when we were driving."

She swept the car up the graveled driveway, swung in a crunching circle, and stopped. The dog in the rear seat made little whining noises.

"Not just yet, girl," Win told her. "I'll let you out before we leave."

"I'm not certain how Lockhart is going to take this," Wilton said as they walked up to the lighted doorway and rang the bell. "He wanted me to come alone."

"I'm your secretary," she said. "I'll wait outside."

The door opened. A big man with enormous shoulders, thick neck, and high forehead stared at them with beady eyes.

"I'm Wilton," the lawyer said.

"Come in. Who's the woman?"

"Miss Layton," the lawyer said, and hesitated.

Blind date with DEATH

Concluding an exciting murder mystery

The big police dog swung its weight downward. Lockhart crashed to the floor



Illustrated by
O. F. Schmidt

"All right. She stays out. Come in, Wilton."

Wilton flashed Win Layton a glance of apology, but there was relief in his eyes, then he entered the house. The door slammed shut. Win walked quickly back toward the car. She opened the car door, looped the dog's leash around her wrist, and said, "Come on out, girl." The dog scrambled down. "Come on," Win said, leading the way toward the house.

The dog whined, as though trying to convey some idea to Win.

Slowly, they started to circle the house, a huge, black pile silhouetted against the star-studded sky. The dog, with its nose to the ground, sniffing and whining, suddenly jerked forward. Her muzzle dropped until the nose was almost touching the ground. Win Layton her voice showing excitement, said, "What is it?"

The dog gave a low, throaty whine, ran forward, two or three steps, swung to the right, sniffed eagerly at the ground, and lunged its weight against the leash.

Win pulled back the dog. "That's all right, girl," she said. "That's all I wanted to know. We have some telephoning to do. Come on."

But the dog refused to budge. Holding her body low to the ground, she strained against

the leash, dragging Win toward the building. Win tugged frantically at the taut leather thong. "Come on, girl," she pleaded. "Please."

The snap in the leash broke loose. The leash came loose in Win's hands. She staggered backwards as the dog shot forward like an arrow projected from a bow.

Win caught her balance, ran after the dog. "Here, girl," she pleaded. "Come back please. Here, girl!" Her plea was useless. Win heard the rattle of claws on cement as the dog bounded up three steps to a broad veranda, dashed across the veranda and scratched and whimpered in front of a closed door.

Win, running swiftly, was just climbing the steps when the dog moved over to paw at the window. Win heard an inarticulate noise from the dark room behind the window, a noise such as might have been made by a man's muffled voice.

The effect on the dog was electrical. She crouched, leapt toward the window. Win heard the crash of falling glass, then the tinkle of slivers of glass dropping to the porch. She heard the dog bark excitedly from the dark interior. There was no time to formulate a plan of action, no time to be concerned as to her personal safety. Win knew only that back

of that broken window was something which would be of absorbing interest to "The Planet."

She reached through the jagged pieces of broken glass, found the catch, unlocked the window, raised the sash, and stepped inside. She felt along the wall for the light switch, and failed to find it. The dog was still barking. Win groped her way toward the sound. Her outstretched hand touched the dog's body. She could feel the back twisting as the animal's tail waved violently. Then Win's exploring hand found the bound figure on the floor. She opened her purse and struck a match.

A man lay on the floor, bound, gagged, and with caked blood on his face. There was a cut on his right temple, a bruise on the left cheek. The match showed a pair of eyes, staring unwinkingly upward at the flickering flame of the match. Win knew, then, that he was blind.

The match burned her fingers. She dropped it. Her fingers struggled with knots on the gag. Soon she loosened it. She heard the man spit out a wad of cloth, then a gentle voice said, "Good old Mimi."

The dog snuggled against his body, whining softly, then dropped to the floor.

Win said, "I'm sorry. I haven't a knife. I'll have to just pick at those knots. Are you all right?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"A newspaper reporter," Win said. "I found your dog."

"And she brought you here," the man said. "I was hoping she could follow, but I didn't see how it was possible. They threw her out of the automobile . . ."

"Can you tell me what happened?" Win's fingers were busy with the knots in the tough fish cord which held the man's arms, elbows and legs rigid. "You'll have to talk fast," she said. "Some one may come."

"I was in my room in the Hillcrest," he explained. "I'd just rented the room this

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by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER